*A minor role*

This poem has irregular line length and stanza structure.

It initially appears uniform but it changes and the poem goes on.

This may be interpreted as the author showing the irregularity of life, and how parts of life can change quite suddenly and unexpectedly.

The impact of the rhythm as a result of these structural changes are very noticeable, which further emphasises the idea of unexpected changes.

There is frequent use of caesura in the poem, particularly with the semi colons in the second stanza.

Imperatives – ‘admit its not’ ‘make you believe’ ‘I’m best observed on stage’ – creates a sense of certainty and precision which juxtaposed with the irregular and varied structure, with a sense of ‘conflict’ between language and structure encouraging a reader to consider the way in which the narrator is attempting to exert power and influence, while at the same time conforming to the irregular structure of unpredictability of the pace and rhythm.

In the second to last stanza, Fanthorpe takes the unusual step of adding an asterisk and then a reference to ‘Oedipus Rex’ which is a tragedy written by Sophocles, a playwright from Ancient Athens. The main character Oedipus begs for his death after learning that as a result of him being separated from his parents at birth, he had unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. While the exact story of the play is not seen as significant to the poem, the choice of this play is interesting because it can be seen as showing that even in the worst situations an individual should not wish for death or deem it better to die, with the following exclamation of “No it wouldn’t!” highlighting this opinion.

There is another form of contrast that is built up in the poem, but rather than being structural, it is instead different semantic fields. One of the key ones within the poem is that relating to medical themes, with words such as “formula” “consultant” “illness” and “dosages” which continue the idea that the narrator is suffering from a form of illness. At the same time there is the semantic field of the stage and drama, such as “roles” and “stage” which often are directly associated to the medical descriptions. This is one of the key ways in which the idea of the ‘minor role’ is brought to the poem.

Identity: There are a range of hints and allusions to the loss of identity within ‘A Minor Role’, in particular the idea of saying thank you for “anything” and the way in which the medical semantic field consumes the poem. There is also the way in which the narrator sees themselves, and the contrast between an on stage and off stage identity, which much of the poem also rests upon. Power: In a similar way to the identity theme, power is also explored through the way in which it is lost and diminished as a result of illness. However, there can also be interpretations of gains in power and influence through medicine and the ‘power’ of the stage.